

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI BABU LAL MARANDI): (a) The possibilities of one tiger or the other having some infection, in a particular zoo can not be ruled out.

(b) Treatment is generally provided for the diseases that assume pathogenic dimensions.

(c) The rules stipulate that all animals in the zoos should be periodically screened against the parasites and prophylactics provided to the animals found positive.

Review of Wild Life Conservation Policy

2822. DR. Y. LAKSHMI PRASAD: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government propose to review the Wild Life/Conservation Policy and probe into irregularities in zoos and protected sanctuaries where thousands die unnatural deaths inspite of several employees to look after the animals;

(b) if so, the details of the proposals; and

(c) if not, how the corrupt officials, who are in league with wild life Mafia will be penalised?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI BABU LAL MARANDI): (a) and (b) Cases of unnatural deaths of 13 tigers in Nandankanan Zoo, about 48 peacocks in Morena District of Madhya Pradesh and 1 lion in Gir Forests have been reported recently. Examination of the cases has revealed that the cause of unnatural death is technical in nature.

(c) There is no conclusive evidence to prove connivance of officials in the episode.

Decline in Country's Forest Cover

2823. SHRI NANA DESHMUKH: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether according to a new UNFPA study the India's forest cover has declined by about 12.5 percent in the last 50 years;

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(b) whether the loss is due to over-exploitation of forest resources, overgrazing, encroachment, forest fires and sitting of development projects in forest areas, as also making rural and urban population responsible for putting pressure on forest resources;

(c) whether most States have followed the natural forest laws pattern except Maharashtra, which has managed to increase the forest cover in the last decade; and

(d) if so, what are Government's plan to tackle the situation?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI BABU LAL MARANDI): (a) and (b) In the UNFPA Report, it is stated that since Independence, forests have declined from 72 million hectares in 1951 to around 63 million hectares in 1997. However, the first scientific assessment of forest cover was done by Forest Survey of India in 1987 using satellite data of the period 1981-83. Since then, forest cover of the country is assessed biennially. According to the seven assessments made so far, forest cover of the country has marginally declined from 19.49% to 19.39% in the period 1981-83 to 1995—98. The UNFPA Report has compared the forest cover assessed by Forest Survey of India in the period 1987 to the figures of recorded forest area of 1951 and 1969, which are not comparable.

(c) and (d) The Ministry of Environment and Forests has prepared a 'National Forestry Action Plan' to enhance the contribution of forestry and tree resources for ecological stability and people centered development through improvement in investment for conservation and development of forest resources.

Sanctuaries in the Country

† 2824. PROF. R. B. S. VARMA: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) what is the total number and details of sanctuaries in the country at present, State-wise;

(b) the amount of funds allocated for these sanctuaries during the last three years;

(c) whether this amount is adequate for maintenance of these sanctuaries;

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.